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THE SOUTH-WESTERN STRIKE OF 1886.*

THE year 1886 is likely to be noted as a great strike year; and, of the many strikes which took place in its course, that on the Missouri Pacific Railroad system had the widest effects and the greatest significance. It was an extreme case,—extreme in its magnitude, extreme in the methods and the temper of the strikers. For that reason, it brings out clearly certain characteristics which, though they are not so prominent in other cases, are yet common to almost all the strikes of the year. The endeavor of the present paper is to put on record an account of this typical movement which shall be full and impartial, and shall stand for future reference as an authentic source of information.

The strike began on the Missouri Pacific system † on the 6th of March, 1886. At ten o'clock of the morning

* The sources of information for this paper have been largely the newspapers, and especially the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, whose reports of the strike were very full. The testimony taken before the Congressional Committee is of great interest and value. It has not yet been published; but I have had access to stenographic reports of the evidence, of which the most important parts were also printed in the newspapers at the time. The Missouri Pacific Company printed several pamphlets, containing the letters and statements put forth at one time or another by the strikers and by the road. These pamphlets contain also reports (by stenographers) of the interviews between the General Board of the Knights of Labor and the Missouri Pacific officers. Conversation and correspondence with those who were engaged in the strike have yielded me much information. The Knights of Labor version of the causes of the strike is to be found in the report presented by Mr. Charles H. Litchman, their present General Secretary, to the order at its convention at Richmond, in October, 1886. The report consists mainly of a reprint of the testimony given before the Congressional Committee by Mr. E. B. Hollis, a Knight of Parsons, Kansas; and to that testimony I shall have frequent occasion to refer.

† The important parts of the Missouri Pacific system are:—

1. The Missouri Pacific proper,—main line from St. Louis to Omaha.
2. The St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern,—main line from St. Louis, through Arkansas, to Texarkana.

of that day, the freight operations of the roads were suddenly brought to a stand-still. At almost all the more important towns,—at St. Louis, Kansas City, Sedalia, De Soto, in Missouri; at Atchison and Parsons, in Kansas; at Little Rock, in Arkansas; at Dallas, Denison, Palestine, in Texas,—a whistle was blown; and the shop-mechanics, yardmen, and switchmen simultaneously quit work, and filed out of the shops and yards. The organization of the strikers was perfect. At every important point, the roads were bared in an instant of men indispensable for the movement of trains.

No warning had been given to the managers of the roads, nor at that particular time were any complaints or demands under discussion. The blow was struck suddenly, and, on the surface, without cause or provocation. Yet it was not unexpected by the roads. Even the general public had been for some days uneasily awaiting a disturbance; and, in the minds of the aggressive workmen, the strike was the culmination of a struggle begun many months before.

We must go back a year or two, in order to find the origin of the dispute. The general depression of 1884 and 1885 had affected the South-western roads, as it had all others. In September, 1884, there had been a general reduction of wages. In March, 1885, a year before the great strike, another reduction was announced. At this reduction, a strike broke out among the shop-mechanics, primarily for the retention of the old wages. As in 1886, it extended over the whole Missouri Pacific system. In Texas, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, the strikers quit work, not quite simultaneously as in the next year, but

3. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (leased),—main line from Hannibal, through Missouri, the Indian Territory, and Texas, to Taylor.
4. The International and Great Northern (leased),—permeating Southern and Eastern Texas.
5. The Central Branch of the Union Pacific (leased),—from St. Joseph, Missouri, westward into Kansas.

within a few days of each other. They not only quit work: they also prevented the roads by force from continuing traffic. Passenger trains were not interfered with, but freight traffic was summarily stopped. Engines were disabled, locked up, or taken in charge; and the handling of freight was prevented by threats or by force. The public was disposed to sympathize with the strikers, notwithstanding their masterful methods. There was the natural feeling of repugnance to a lowering of wages; and there was prejudice against a railroad system which was believed to be under the control of Mr. Jay Gould. The governors of the States of Missouri and Kansas, feeling that they were backed by public opinion, took it on themselves to suggest an adjustment of the trouble. Of their own motion, they approached the railroad managers, and formally "recommended and requested" that wages should be restored to the rates which had been paid in September, 1884, and that all workmen who had struck should be taken back without prejudice for the part taken in the strike. These recommendations were signed by them as governors, and were signed, also, by the railroad commissioners of both States, and by the labor commissioner of Missouri. The railroads could not do otherwise than submit. Their traffic was annihilated; public opinion and the State government were against them. They accepted the terms proposed.

The victory of the strikers in 1885 was, beyond doubt, a main cause of their summary action in the following year. Their victory had been complete. They had taken possession of the road, controlled it for a week, violated the law, and had got what they wanted. Not a man was the worse off for having struck. Not a man was even blamed for having prevented by force the movement of trains. They could not but regard the result as proof at once of the soundness of their methods, and of the almost irresistible power of their organization.

The Knights of Labor did not appear publicly during the strike of 1885; but it is probable that most of the shop-mechanics, who were the active movers in the strike, were Knights, and that the tactics of the strikers came from that organization. In the course of the year, it had an extraordinary growth, and began to be seen on the surface of affairs. In April and May of 1885, we hear for the first time of lodges of the Knights in Sedalia. In September, District Assembly No. 101 was formed, comprising all Knights of the Missouri Pacific system. At first, it was composed of but five Local Assemblies; but, before the strike of 1886, the Local Assemblies were thirty, and the members were numbered by thousands. The growth took place largely by the absorbing of the existing lodges and unions of the railroad workmen.* The appearance of the Knights consolidated the organization of the workmen, and rendered them more confident of their strength. For the moment, however, it made no essential change in the situation.

The year from March, 1885, to March, 1886, was an uneasy one for the railroads and for their employees. There was continual rubbing. The Knights of Labor took a commanding tone, and began to assume authority in the details of the management of the roads. The time was one of depression and of scant business, and a reduction of the working force was called for. The most economical way of reducing the force would have been to discharge some of the men, keeping the remainder at work on full time. But the men demanded that the reduction

* The switchmen, while they joined the Knights, maintained also a separate organization of their own, and in February, 1886, formed a national association ("The Switchmen's Mutual Aid Association"). But, so far as the South-western strike is concerned, the switchmen may be treated henceforth as merely members of the Knights of Labor. Their general association seems not to have influenced the strike. Some testimony before the Congressional Committee indicated that, at the time of the strike of 1885, most shop-mechanics were members of "mixed" assemblies of the Knights. District Assembly 101 is a trade assembly, composed exclusively of railroad workmen.

should be made by lessening the hours of work for all, without reducing the number employed. The road submitted, and shortened hours without reducing numbers. A more serious interference occurred when the men took it on themselves to say where and how repairs should be made. Some cars and engines at Palestine, Texas, needed repair. The managers wished to take them to another place for repair; but the men insisted that the work should be done at that place, and struck against the grievance of its being done elsewhere. The road again submitted. At various points, as at the large shops at De Soto, mechanics and foremen were discharged by the road, not because they failed to do their work satisfactorily, but because it was necessary to discharge them in order to stave off a strike by the Knights. Discipline became lax and work expensive, especially in the shops. The Knights frequently demanded that no member of their order should be discharged without previous written accusation and opportunity for defence. But, though they often managed to bring about the employment or discharge of particular men, they could not secure a formal admission of this general principle. It played no small part in their grievances after the strike broke out.*

* The superintendent of the system testified before the Congressional Committee that "since the strike of 1885 there has been a reduction of discipline in our shops, and work has not been so well done." A foreman from De Soto said that, "for eight months before [the strike of 1886], the men were not doing justice to the company." The master-mechanic at St. Louis testified similarly that "after the strike of 1885 I saw a growing insubordination," and that "the men, during the latter part of 1885 and the early part of 1886, were not doing what was fair in many instances." The testimony of Sibley, the general superintendent of the Missouri Pacific proper, contains many details as to the efforts which the Knights made, often with success, to secure the discharge of men obnoxious to them and the employment of members of their order.

The following communications relate to the Parsons foundry dispute, which Hollis, as quoted in Litchman's report, referred to as one of the grievances of the strikers. The superintendent of the Missouri Pacific, Sibley, received on Oct. 4, 1885, the following laconic telegram from Parsons, Kansas:—

"E. K. Sibley: You are wanted here immediately to avoid trouble at shops. (Signed) J. B. Brennan, A. Boyd, Committee."

In August of 1885, a strike broke out on the Wabash road. The Wabash, which, like the Missouri Pacific, is called a "Gould road," had a management entirely distinct from that of the Missouri Pacific. Indeed, it was in the hands of receivers, and was managed, in contemplation of law, by the United States court. The Knights of Labor, in their struggle with the Wabash, declared a boycott on its cars. The Missouri Pacific interchanged traffic with the Wabash on a large scale, and the boycott seriously involved its business. Nevertheless, it submitted, and during the three or four weeks of the Wabash strike refrained from handling Wabash cars.* During

Sibley's answer, which I quote in full, was:—

"On account of previous important engagement, it is hardly possible for me to come to Parsons immediately. I should be greatly obliged if you will put any grievance you may have in writing, and present it to your master-mechanic. I will take the matter up and come to Parsons, provided it cannot be arranged without my doing so. I assure you that it is our intention to deal justly and fairly with all men, in view of which I trust you will present the matter as suggested in this telegram."

The following message came in reply the same day:—

"Your telegram of October 9 is received, and will say that we have submitted our grievance to Mr. Smith, the master-mechanic, and got no satisfaction from him. Our grievance is this: the foundry, at this point, has been running but three or four days per week for the last six or seven months, on account of lack of orders. Now, the orders have come in so fast and are so far ahead of the foundry department that, without any more coming in, the foundry cannot fill orders on hand before the 1st of January, 1886, by working six days per week and ten hours per day. We also respectfully inform you that the amount of help has been reduced in the foundry by men quitting, and so forth [“They do not claim there were any discharged,” remarks Sibley], and that none have been hired in their places, thereby causing one man to do two men's work; and we will state right here that we find it impossible to do anything with Mr. Smith, and will say in conclusion that, if you want things to run smoothly at this point, you will grant these demands in person or telegram immediately. The demands, to be brief, are, as we demand, as follows: that the foundry be ordered to work hereafter six days a week of ten hours a day, and that the help in the foundry be restored to its original number.—J. B. Brennan, A. W. B. Laughlin, *Committee.*”

This correspondence is given in Sibley's testimony before the Congressional Committee. Sibley says that he went to Parsons and informed the men that, if they worked on full time till January, there would be nothing for them to do thereafter. He offered to give them work five days in the week, nine hours each day. After refraining from work for a week, the men accepted these terms. It will be remembered that they had insisted, in the spring of 1885, that, if work became slack, there should be no reduction in the force, but a reduction in working hours.

See also the passage quoted in the foot-note to p. 209.

* During the Wabash strike, the Knights required the Missouri Pacific to refrain from housing Wabash engines at its round-house in St. Louis. The

the much-talked-of struggle between the Knights of Labor and the Mallory Steamship Line at Galveston, a strike on a part of the Missouri Pacific system was declared by the Knights, to enforce the boycott against the Mallory Line; and the road again submitted. But the commands of the Knights were becoming unbearable for the managers of the roads. As early as the autumn of 1885, they became convinced that sooner or later they must fight the Knights. These, on the other hand, became more aggressive and self-confident. A decisive struggle was impending.

A break in the situation occurred in December, 1885, when the Texas and Pacific road was put in the hands of receivers. This road runs from New Orleans through Louisiana and Texas to El Paso. It had been operated by the Missouri Pacific as part of the Missouri Pacific system. The result of the foreclosure against it, and of the appointment of the receivers, was not only that its management became independent, but also that old contracts and agreements were no longer legally binding on it. The Missouri Pacific agreement of 1885, if it had been at any time a valid contract, at all events did not now fetter the Texas and Pacific. Shortly after the appointment of the receivers, a committee of the Knights of Labor appeared before one of them,—Mr. Brown,—and asked him to ratify that agreement. No decided answer was given, and in February, 1886, they again appeared, and presented to Mr. Brown a new agreement.* Mr.

Missouri Pacific had contracted to perform this service for the Wabash, that road having no house of its own; but it submitted, and turned the Wabash engines away. A part of the round-house force then became superfluous, and the Missouri Pacific wished to discharge half a dozen men. The Knights objected. At first, they demanded that the hours of work should be reduced, the force remaining the same. When it was pointed out that this was impracticable, they selected six men whom *they* considered incompetent, and whom they wished to have discharged. The master-mechanic said these six were his best men. This is the story of one of the Knights' committee-men, a carpenter named Palmer, who testified before the Congressional Committee.

* This proposed agreement stipulated that no reduction should be made in the wages of any employee, unless it were "decided" by an arbitration com-

Brown answered that he was an officer of the court, and managed the road under the orders of the court. He promised to do full justice to employees, but reminded them that old contracts were no longer binding on the road, and that rigid economy was necessary in its management.

No further steps were taken by either party. But the Knights understood that the Texas and Pacific had made a declaration of independence. Indeed, they believed that the road had been put into receivers' hands for the express purpose of freeing it from the agreement of 1885, and giving it the support of the federal courts.* They regarded the Texas and Pacific as still a part of the South-western system, and they prepared to fight the whole system. The executive committee of District Assembly No. 101 sent out a circular to the Local Assemblies, asking if they would support the executive committee in insisting on the recognition of the Knights. "We were prepared to decide on a strike at any minute."†

Both parties were looking forward to a struggle; the leaders of the Knights seem to have been even eager for it; and an occasion soon arose. On the 19th of February, two weeks after the correspondence between Receiver Brown and the Knights, a man named Hall, a foreman in the Texas and Pacific shops at Marshall, Texas, was dis-

missed of six, of whom half were to be appointed by the railroad company (the receivership was ignored), and half by the Knights; that all rolling-stock of the company, and all foreign rolling-stock injured on its road, should be repaired in the company's shops; that all promotions, "such as foremen," should be from the ranks; and that all disputes should be referred to another mixed committee of six, whose decision was to be final. See the correspondence as printed in full in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* of March 9, 1886.

* See the statement of the Knights of Labor, signed by Martin Irons, in the *St. Louis Republican* of March 11, 1886. The same belief was declared by several Knights in their testimony before the Congressional Committee.

† See Irons's testimony before the Congressional Committee. The circular also asked for support in insisting on \$1.50 a day as minimum pay for unskilled labor. I have not seen any formal demand on the railroad officers for that rate of pay, though in Hollis's testimony it is said that such a request

charged. Hall was a prominent Knight. He had been one of the committee which presented the demands of the Knights to Brown. There had been a convention of District Assembly No. 101 at Marshall, and he had attended its meetings. The railroad officers said that he had exceeded the leave of absence granted him for attending the convention. Hall and the Knights strenuously denied it. The railroad officers said that Hall was a lax and inefficient foreman. This also was denied. A workman who had the backing of the Knights of Labor, in the temper prevailing in that organization, was not likely to be over-careful in looking after the interests of his employer or in obeying his orders. On the other hand, the railroad officers were restive under the bonds which the Knights were tightening on them. They were released in law from the old agreement, and they were not unwilling to have a pretext for getting rid of objectionable men.* It is not very material what is the truth in this particular matter. If the struggle had not come at that point, it would have come at another. The *full* struggle—an inevitable one—was not on the merits of any single case; it was not even on the merits of the various subjects of dispute during the preceding year: it was a struggle for power. The control which the Knights of Labor were trying to exercise over the general management of the roads was at issue.

Hall was discharged on February 19. On the 24th, a member of the executive board of the Knights of Labor telegraphed to the general agent of the receivers to come

was presented to Mr. Hoxie in September, 1885. It certainly was not pressed. The circular was of date February 1, before the Hall affair, and before any direct dispute. Hollis, as quoted in Litchman's report, being asked, "Had you predetermined that [to strike] before the discharge of Hall?" answered: "Yes. There was no time arranged, but it was decided it should be done before the 1st of May."

*It may not be without significance that Hall had succeeded a foreman who had been removed, at the request of the Knights, for alleged incompetency. The railroad officers said that Hall was less efficient than his predecessor.

to Marshall, "to settle trouble at the shops." The agent answered, also by telegraph, that he knew of no trouble, and was too busy to come. On the 28th, he received a peremptory telegram, signed by Martin Irons,—the first appearance of that person in the strike.* To this message no attention was paid. The following morning Irons sent another message, again asking an immediate answer. Still no attention was paid to him. The receivers and their officers certainly had reason to believe that serious events were impending; but they said that they knew of no troubles with their employees, and made no serious effort to avert the struggle. The Knights were even more indifferent to efforts for peace. Irons did not trouble himself to go to Dallas to confer with the receivers' agent;† nor did Hall go, though both were given an opportunity. Irons thought the agent had better come to see *him* at Marshall. The strike was ordered on the twenty-four hours' notice given by Irons's telegram. At three o'clock in the afternoon of March 1, on a signal from the whistle, the shop-men at Marshall, Big Springs, and Forth, important points on the Texas and Pacific, dropped their

* Irons's telegram was as follows:—

"Gov. Sheldon [one of the receivers] referred me to Dallas [where the agent was]. I cannot come to Dallas, cannot control matters here long. If not settled by 2 o'clock March 1, 1886 [*the next day*], must call out Texas and Pacific employees. Answer immediately by telegraph what action you will take."

See the telegrams in the *Globe-Democrat* of March 9. They are also printed in Receiver Brown's testimony before the Congressional Committee. Irons, it should be said, was not employed by the Texas and Pacific, but by the Missouri Pacific.

† Irons testified before the Congressional Committee that passes were given to Hall for that person and two with him, to enable them to go to Dallas. But the executive board numbered five; and none of them went, "simply because there were not passes for the whole board, and by going to Dallas it cut me off from the use of the company's books,—a thing that we had been promised." "I thought that it cost nothing for railroad officials to travel, and that Marshall was the proper place to investigate; and I concluded that they had better come there, and so telegraphed Governor Brown and Colonel Noble." Irons said that, even if the passes had been handed directly to him, and not to Hall ("ignoring us as a committee"), he would not have gone to Dallas.

tools and quit work. The first move in the battle had been made.

The receivers of the Texas and Pacific at once took the position which the roads maintained unflinchingly throughout the struggle. A citizens' committee at Marshall tried to bring about a truce. The receivers said they were willing to meet men actually in their service, but not men who had abandoned the service; that they would not confer with a committee of the Knights of Labor; and that they reserved the right to discharge for cause whomever they pleased. The men had declared themselves willing to return to work for the present, if a conference with a committee of the Knights were granted; but they could not accept the terms offered by the receivers. The strike went on; and, after the unsuccessful negotiations with Brown, it spread. A boycott was ordered on cars of the Texas and Pacific road; and this boycott was not resisted by the Missouri Pacific,—a circumstance worth remembering. The road submitted for several days so far as not to touch the Texas and Pacific cars which were on its line. But the spread of the strike could not be checked. On March 6, the Knights delivered their second and severest blow,—the simultaneous strike on all the lines of the Missouri Pacific. It was a surprise to the officers of that system; for, though they knew the struggle must come sooner or later, they did not expect it at that time.* On the 8th, a third blow, and a serious one, was given. The workmen of the St. Louis Bridge Company struck. The bridge forms an independent railroad, running from East St. Louis, on the Illinois side of the river, over the bridge and through a tunnel into St. Louis. Almost all the terminal facilities in St. Louis are in its hands. It gives the only rail com-

*There is something very curious in the reluctance of the leaders of the strikers to give the exact language of the message ordering the strike on the Missouri Pacific. Irons was asked by the Congressional Committee what it

munication between St. Louis and the East; and the twelve roads which converge in East St. Louis all have to use it in forwarding their traffic to St. Louis. It is leased by the Missouri Pacific and the Wabash jointly, but is operated as an independent road. When the strike extended to the bridge, the city of St. Louis was deprived of by far the greater part of its railroad communications.

After the strike was in full swing, after the system (which will presently be described) of stopping by force all traffic had been put into complete operation, then first did the strikers bring forward their grievances against the Missouri Pacific road. The St. Louis *Republican* printed on March 11 a statement of grievances, dated March 10, and signed by Martin Irons, the chairman of the executive board of District Assembly 101 of the Knights of Labor. It was said to have been mailed to Mr. Hoxie, the manager of the Missouri Pacific, but was never received by him;* and it was sent to no paper except the *Republican*, which had shown some disposition to sympathize with the strikers. It was, in fact, a manifesto to the public, and was issued in answer to an open letter addressed to the Missouri Pacific employees, which Mr. Hoxie had put forth a day or two before. Hoxie had laid stress on the fact that the alleged cause of the strike was the discharge of a man on the Texas and Pacific, a road with which the Missouri Pacific had nothing to do. This consideration was urged against the strikers time

was. He said he had written it himself, but had "forgotten" its meaning. Being asked, "You can't give any idea as to its length or how it began?" he answered, "No." But later, being asked if it read, "Strike on Saturday, March 6, 10 A.M.," he said: "Well, I presume that is about the sum and substance of it. There may have been something before that." It was in cipher.

Irons had telegraphed to Mr. Kerrigan, the general superintendent of the Missouri Pacific system, that he should come to Marshall to "settle trouble"; but, as Marshall was outside of that gentleman's jurisdiction, he very naturally answered that he would not go there unless by the request of the Texas and Pacific officers.

* Irons admitted in his testimony before the Congressional Committee that this document had never been mailed to Hoxie.

and again during the next three months, and they found it difficult to meet. They could not be convinced that, after the receivership, the Texas and Pacific ceased to be an integral part of the Gould system;* but they were met by the stubborn fact that the road was, in contemplation of law, in the hands of the United States court, and they felt called on to show that they had a quarrel with the Missouri Pacific itself. Accordingly, they set forth their grievances or demands. They asked, first of all, a formal recognition of the Knights of Labor by a conference between the officers of the road and District Assembly 101; increase of wages for various workmen; the establishment of an apprenticeship system, by which but one apprentice was to be allowed for eight mechanics; an elaborate and formal system of accusation and trial before a Knight of Labor could be discharged;† and, lastly, that all men "unjustly discharged" be reinstated at the end of the strike. They alleged that the company had repeatedly violated the agreement of 1885.

But these matters are not put forward as the main causes of the strike. Its true object appears in this vigorous passage, at the beginning of the manifesto: "It

* This feeling was not unnatural on the part of men as little conversant with law as were the strikers. Mr. Brown, one of the receivers, had been general solicitor of the Missouri Pacific and a vice-president of the Texas and Pacific; though the other receiver, Mr. Sheldon, had had no connection with either road. The receivership brought very little change in the details of management, most officers being retained. The Knights had a similar feeling in regard to the Wabash road,—that it was practically managed from the Gould offices in New York. Several of them intimated, in their testimony before the Congressional Committee, that they believed the federal courts to be conniving with Mr. Gould and other enemies of theirs.

† "When any employees who are Knights of Labor do not give satisfaction in the capacity in which they are engaged, it shall be made known to them in writing, that they may defend themselves in the following manner: the accused party to select two persons to aid in conducting the defence, and the officer of the company in immediate charge to be allowed to select two persons to assist in conducting the prosecution; and that the accused be tried before three disinterested parties," etc. "The accused must be allowed to remain at work until the charges are either disproved or substantiated."

is the belief of Knights of Labor on the system that the companies have inaugurated a systematic method for the purpose of breaking up the organization of the Knights of Labor, and that the placing of the Texas and Pacific in the hands of a receiver and under the jurisdiction of the United States court is the main feature of the scheme ; and in order to meet and defeat these contemptible and blood-sucking corporations and their governmental allies, and in order to secure redress for grievances and the following demands, we have inaugurated this strike.”* In truth, the leaders of the Knights paid little attention to the redress of grievances. Irons informed the Congressional Committee that the executive committee of District Assembly 101 had as many as a hundred grievances in its hands, which had accumulated from the Local Assemblies ; but it had not presented any of them to the officers of the roads. The only reason given for this inaction was “the pressure of other duties.” When Irons was on his way to

* The same spirit is shown still more plainly in the manifesto issued, a few days later, by District Assembly No. 93, which, as will presently be seen, came to the support of Assembly No. 101 by extending the strike to Illinois. In this document, it is said : “We are dealing with a class of men who combine their capital, not merely for the purpose of transacting legitimate business, but of doing so on a scale so large as to control and imperiously command every interest directly or indirectly growing out of that business, or to crush what they cannot control or command. . . . But, in the transaction of that business, it becomes indispensable that they should utilize a certain power, without which their business is as an engine without steam. That power is vested in another class of men, who, profiting by the lesson taught them by the owners of capital, like them have chosen to combine, . . . for the purpose not only of transacting their legitimate business, but of doing so on a scale so large as to control and imperiously command every interest directly or indirectly growing out of that business, or crushing what they cannot control or command.”—*Globe-Democrat*, March 12.

In Hollis’s testimony, as adopted in Litchman’s report, the grievances of the Knights are stated somewhat differently. It is alleged : (1) that in 1885 only the wages of men who had struck were restored, not those of men unconcerned in the strike of that year (this was frequently complained of, by the Knights, who testified before the Congressional Committee, as a violation of the agreement of 1885, yet that agreement had specified “striking employees”); (2) that mechanics were not so highly paid as their skill warranted (“I consider, as a mechanic, that I have judgment as well as the officials,”

Marshall to attend the convention there, he stopped in St. Louis, and had a conversation with Mr. Kerrigan, the general superintendent of the Missouri Pacific system, who gave him a pass to Marshall. At this time, the circular asking the Local Assemblies if they would support a strike had already been sent out; yet the concurrent testimony of Kerrigan and of Irons shows that the latter said not a word as to grievances or impending troubles, though he obtained his pass on the ground that he was on his way to a convention of Knights.

The strike was now in full blast. At first, the operations of the roads, so far as the carriage of freight was concerned, came almost completely to a stand-still. But this was not due entirely, or even mainly, to the impossibility of getting men to do the work. The strikers by no means

said Mr. Hollis); (3) that Mr. Hoxie refused to establish a rule that charges in writing should be brought against a man, and an opportunity be given him to defend himself, before he could be discharged; (4) that the road refused to pay all common laborers \$1.50 a day; (5) in general, that men were discharged because of their connection with labor organizations. Only a single specific case of this last-mentioned grievance is referred to.

Hall, whose discharge was the occasion of the strike, testified as follows before the Congressional Committee: —

“Q.—Was it your understanding that one of the objects of the strike was to make your opponents feel the power of the order, so as to respect its demands more quickly next time? A.—The recognition that labor had, or should have, with the officers of the roads gained gradually in the government of the road; that is, in the wages that should be paid the men for certain classes of work.”

“Q.—One of the objects was to make the railroad officials understand that they should recognize the officials of the Knights of Labor as such in adjusting grievances and differences? A.—Yes, sir.”

Hall also admitted frankly that the strike had been “a serious blunder and mistake.”

Perhaps the fairest statement of what the Knights meant when they demanded a “recognition” of the order was also given by Hall: “I think it is that the officials, not only of this road, but of other roads, should recognize and treat with a committee appointed by the order to settle by arbitration the difficulties or grievances that might arise. As it is and has been, a man employed on this railroad, for instance, is appointed on a committee to adjust a grievance; and he is liable to be discharged for it. If the order was recognized so that they would be there, recognized in an official capacity, it would be a man not employed by the railroad, over whom they could have no control; and, consequently, he could do better, and could make a better demand, than one who is employed by the road, and afraid to speak out what he thinks.”

included all the employees. Much the greater part of the workmen took no part in it. The locomotive engineers from the first refused to aid or abet the strikers, and a bitter quarrel arose in consequence between their Brotherhood and the Knights of Labor.* The conductors were equally out of sympathy with the strikers, and in many places passed public resolutions expressing their willingness to conduct trains. The firemen and brakemen, as a rule, remained loyal to the company, and were willing to work, unless prevented by force or threats. Many unskilled laborers seem to have taken no part in the strike. The Knights of Labor resorted to circulars addressed to "all laborers, such as trackmen, engine-wipers, coach-cleaners, baggage and freight hands," calling on them to lend aid to the Knights by refraining from work. The actual strikers were mainly shop-mechanics, switchmen, and yardmen. These were the men concentrated at the centres of traffic, at the larger shops and yards, at the places where machinery was overhauled and most of the freight was shipped and received, where all trains had to stop and their movement was most complicated and difficult. These were the most vulnerable points on the roads; yet, also, since they were fairly populous towns, the points where it would have been easiest to replace the men who left work. No doubt, the sudden departure of all the skilled shop-mechanics and of the practised yardmen and switchmen must in any event have crippled the roads for some time. Yet business might have been continued in some fashion, and before long men could undoubtedly have been found to fill the vacant places.†

* At a general convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, held on September 5, a vote was passed approving the course of their chief, Mr. Arthur, during the strike. Mr. Arthur had told the engineers to remain at their posts and to disregard the strike.

† The records of the Missouri Pacific system state that on March 6 there were employed on the whole system 13,393 men, not including general office employees. Of these, 3,717 struck; while 6,095 were suspended because the strike put an end to the work on which they were engaged.

But the fighting machinery of the strikers was by no means limited to the mere act of quitting work. They took complete possession of the roads, and systematically put a stop to all freight traffic. When the strike broke out, squads of Knights stationed themselves in the yards and buildings; and the railroad officers were formally notified that the premises were under their guard. Thus, at the large yards at St. Louis, under pretence of protecting the property of the roads, none but striking Knights were permitted to enter. When an attempt was made to move trains against their will, they went farther. Two days after the strike began, some Missouri Pacific officers at Denison, Texas, tried to move a freight train. "The watchman whom the Knights of Labor had stationed on the premises pulled the large shop whistle, and about two hundred strikers appeared in an incredibly short space of time. After failing to argue the officers out of their purpose, they opened the furnace of the engine and drenched the fire with water through a hose, took off the steam-pipes, knocked the pins out of the side-rod, and killed her dead. All other engines in the shop, except passenger engines, were also bled to death, and rendered as useless for power as so much old iron. The strikers then put guards about the buildings, and would allow no one not a railroad man to go about the premises."* That is typical of the course of events during the first fortnight of the strike. The disabling, or "killing," of engines was the simplest and most effective way of stopping traffic; and every freight engine the strikers could find was "killed."† If a train succeeded in getting ready, the strikers tried to persuade the engineer to abandon the engine, the persuasion rising often to a warning of danger. If the engineer remained

* St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, March 9.

† The roads report that, of 598 engines in service, no less than 434, or nearly three-quarters of the whole number, were disabled at one time or another during the strike.

steadfast, they boarded the train, set the brakes, and pulled out the coupling-pins. If a train managed to get off, they mounted any engine that was at hand, started in pursuit, and put the train on a side-track.

The stoppage of traffic was confined, in the main, to freight operations. Passenger trains, as a rule, were not interfered with, though the general demoralization of the whole system necessarily made the passenger service uncertain and hazardous. The strikers' willingness to spare passenger traffic was not due to any regard for the convenience of the public. It seems to have been based on the idea of respecting the United States mails, which were carried on almost all the passenger trains. Suburban trains, which carried no mails, were stopped as peremptorily as freight trains; and, for ten days, few of the regular trains could be run between St. Louis and the suburban towns on the Missouri Pacific. The fear of encountering the federal government, which saved the mail trains, showed itself in other ways. When a car loaded with supplies for federal troops came along, it was taken in charge by the strikers, put behind an engine, and sent on to its destination. Of greater importance was the fact that the Wabash road, which was in receivers' hands and enjoyed the protection of the federal courts, was, practically, not interfered with at all. The Texas and Pacific, though also in the hands of the federal courts, was treated as summarily as any of the Missouri Pacific's own lines, perhaps because the Texas and Pacific had been so recently an integral part of the Missouri Pacific system.*

* The protection of the United States courts could probably have been invoked by the Missouri Pacific for its own lines. The so-called Ku-klux Acts, passed in 1870 and 1871, Revised Statutes, §§ 5508, 5519, very likely sufficed to give federal jurisdiction. But the road refrained from forcing matters in this way. It waited until public opinion called on the State authorities for action. Injunctions were immediately obtained in the State courts of Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas, restraining the strikers from trespassing on the company's grounds and obstructing its trains; but not the least attention was paid to them.

Meanwhile, the policy of Mr. Hoxie, the manager of the Missouri Pacific, was one of masterly inactivity. It was a shrewd policy. The road was under the cloud of suspicion which, rightly or wrongly, overhung everything connected with the name of Gould. Public opinion at first was against it. In the innumerable statements and counter-statements which day after day filled the newspaper columns, it was hard to discern the true character of the strike; and the public was inclined to think that the Gould road was in the wrong. As long as this was the case, the road could not hope for vigorous aid from the State and city authorities; and, without such aid, the strikers could not be successfully met. Mr. Hoxie accordingly let the effects of the strike work themselves out. For form's sake, attempts were made to run trains; but the strikers easily and promptly stopped them. Injunctions were served, and some arrests of trespassing strikers took place; but this notification that they were law-breakers, while it may have had an effect on the minds of the strikers, did not cause them to swerve a particle from their chosen line of conduct. Freight traffic lay dead. The road discharged or suspended conductors, engineers, clerks, freight hands, station agents, telegraphers, for whom it had no work, and brought home the meaning of the struggle to them and to the public. In the early days of the strike, the police commissioners in St. Louis were asked to protect the road. They evaded the demand by saying they had no men to spare. Mr. Hoxie told them he could wait as long as they could;* and he waited.

The effect of this policy was quickly apparent. The merchants of the large cities, and especially those of St. Louis, found their business melting away. Factories felt a dearth of material, especially of fuel. In many directions, their goods could not be shipped. Several flour-mills and brick-works had to close: others had to buy

*I have this on Mr. Hoxie's own statement.

coal at high prices. The entire coal supply of St. Louis comes from Illinois, and the strike on the bridge stopped rail communication with the eastern side. The ferries for a while afforded a substitute ; but, when the strike extended across the river to East St. Louis (of which more presently), coal was absolutely shut out. Indeed, Eastern roads were then entirely disabled from business. A degree of relief was found, however, in an unexpected quarter. The Wabash, one of the so-called Gould roads, was protected, as has already been noted, by the federal courts, and carried on its operations with little trouble throughout the strike. As it happened, the yards of the Wabash, alone of all the roads centring in St. Louis, were so placed that it could easily transfer cars from the eastern to the western side of the river ; and, on both sides, it was effectively protected by the federal arm. This became known to shippers, and the road secured a large business. Moreover, certain coal mines, which were "Gould properties," were on the line of the Wabash in Illinois. When coal became scarce in St. Louis, these mines, shipping over the Wabash, found an active market at high prices. The strikers, in order to check this disappointing turn of affairs, tried to induce the coal-miners in Illinois to strike, but without success. The result was, curiously enough, that both the Wabash and the Gould mines found the strike highly profitable.

At the less important places on the line of the Missouri Pacific system, the effects of the strike were more serious. At various points, factories were closed. At Sedalia, the head-quarters of the strikers, where Irons lived, coal gave out at the end of a week. The strikers informed Mr. Hoxie that they would permit coal-trains to be run to the town, but they were promptly told that either all trains must run or none at all. The inconvenience and distress were greatest in the towns of the interior and among the farmers. Small stocks of goods were kept in

the villages on the line of the roads. They were dependent on the regular continuance of railway service. Groceries, flour, oil, fuel, became scarce. In many places, actual distress ensued, and trains of wagons were started to supply the most urgent needs.

Public opinion began to veer. It was, however, singularly slow in expressing itself. The newspapers at the outset reflected the general uncertainty; and three of the largest papers in the State* had begun by abusing Jay Gould, blaming the roads, and encouraging the strikers. Their tone changed as the strike went on, and even those that at first catered most subserviently to the "labor interest," tried to rein in the Knights. Two weeks after the strike broke out, meetings began to be held at towns on the line of the road, protesting against the blockade and the methods by which the strikers maintained it. In St. Louis, the first public protest was made as late as March 24; and it was very mild. People did not rally quickly to the support of the Gould road, but they were forced to it by the facts of the situation. The most significant sign of the change in public opinion was in the action of the governors of Missouri and Kansas. As in the previous year, they interposed of their own accord. They sought out the Knights at Kansas City on the 19th. After discussing the situation with them, they addressed the next day a letter to Mr. Hoxie. They admitted that the company had kept its agreement of 1885, but asked that it should take back its old employees without prejudice for their action in the strike. Mr. Hoxie answered that he was willing to take back the old men; but he would take back none who had committed violence, and would discharge none who had been engaged since the strike began. The Knights testily repudiated the interference of the governors, and ignored Mr. Hoxie's offer.†

*The St. Louis *Republican* and *Post-Dispatch*, and the Kansas City *Times*.

†See the letters in *Official Correspondence* (a pamphlet issued by the Missouri Pacific), pp. 25-33. Kochitsky, the Commissioner of Labor Statistics

A few days later, on the 23d and 24th, proclamations were issued by the governors of Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas, ordering the company to resume traffic, and forbidding all persons from interference with it.

Mr. Hoxie judged it was time to move. He had the public behind him at last. The city authorities in St. Louis now gave him all the policemen he wanted. On the 24th of March, eighteen days after the strike began, the first freight train was moved out of St. Louis. Half a hundred policemen were on it, and as many private guards. Another half-hundred policemen lined the tracks. There were some hitches. Coupling-pins were drawn, and the train broke in two; but it was brought together again, and got off with comparatively little trouble. Another train went from St. Louis the next day, under the same precautions. This time, a few miles out of the city, shots were exchanged between the train-guards and the strikers; but no one was hit. Still another train went out the third day; and, from that time on, the blockade was broken. At various points, trains were started during these days, always under heavy guard; and most of them succeeded in getting through. They encountered misplaced switches and crowds of threatening strikers. The engineers were warned that it was not safe to run. But, by the last days of March, freight trains were running on all parts of the system,—in Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas. There were points (such as Parsons, Kansas) where the strikers remained in possession, and everywhere traffic was still slow and uncertain. But the blockade was broken. The people on the line of the roads expressed their satisfac-

of Missouri, stated to the Congressional Committee that Powderly, who was present at the conferences between the governors and the Knights, had agreed with the governors that the men should go to work on the terms here proposed by Hoxie. "But the executive committee [of Assembly 101], when they were informed of this result, said: 'No, we cannot accept it. We only want an interview with Mr. Hoxie.'"

tion in the spontaneous Western fashion. At Warrensburg, Missouri, the first freight train arrived on the 27th. "One thousand citizens, headed by the mayor and the Quarry City cornet band, met the train, and set up Havana cigars for the train men." At Appleton City, "flags were displayed; and a large crowd of citizens, headed by the brass band, repaired to the depot, where a couple of pieces were played, and three cheers given for the men who were willing to assist in resuming freight traffic. The train crew were presented with a box of fine cigars."

The turning-point had been reached: the strikers were virtually defeated. They did not admit it. Indeed, as yet they did not realize it. But they saw that they were losing ground, and must make another aggressive move. They had been threatening from the first to extend the strike, and make it general on the roads west of the Mississippi. So much they never succeeded in doing. But at St. Louis they were able to deliver one other blow: they extended the strike to East St. Louis. As early as March 13, District Assembly 93 of the Knights of Labor had sent a circular letter to the managers of the roads running into East St. Louis, asking an advance of switchmen's wages to what is known as the "Chicago scale." This demand, not unreasonable in itself, had been granted by some roads, and promised to be granted by the rest, as early as the 19th. Nevertheless, on the 25th, the day after the Missouri Pacific succeeded in running its first freight train out of St. Louis, the yardmen and switchmen in East St. Louis, at the usual whistle signal, simultaneously quit work. No grievances were alleged. The strike was avowedly meant to aid the Missouri Pacific strikers; Assembly 93 came to the aid of Assembly 101. The effect was to stop entirely all traffic between St. Louis and the East. The roads running into East St. Louis, though prevented by the strike from crossing the

bridge, had hitherto made shift to transfer some freight to St. Louis by ferry. But now the roads themselves were prevented from doing anything. The city of East St. Louis is a collection of railroad yards and sheds, interspersed with rickety wooden buildings. Its inhabitants are mainly the railroad workmen and purveyors of food, drink, and lodging to them. The city authorities were known to be in sympathy with the strikers. The place is on the Illinois side of the river; hence policemen from St. Louis and militia-men from Missouri were not to be feared. The strikers openly boasted that it would not be as easy to run trains here as in St. Louis.

Meanwhile, in the States west of the river, the strikers became more bitter and lawless in proportion as the roads were successful in resuming operations. The killing of engines and side-tracking of trains, which had been common in the earlier stage, were succeeded by more reckless violence. The tracks were soaped, switches were tampered with and trains thrown off. Signal lights were changed. Bridges and trestles were burned. The engineers received more and more frequent anonymous warnings that it was "not safe" to run trains.* Threatening letters, also

*The following, which was handed to the Congressional Committee by an engineer, is a specimen, and rather a moderate one:—

"March 22, 1886.

"ADDRESSED TO ENGINEERS AND FIREMEN:

"Boys,—We warn you not to run trains out of Atchison. It is with regret we tell you, as we call you brothers.

"If you do, your life will pay the forfeit. Boys, we want to throw off the yoke of serfdom, and be free men like yourselves. Don't deny us what at one time you prayed for."

One of the shop-foremen received this blood-thirsty epistle:—

COW-BOYS' RANCH, TEXAS, May 1, 1886.

H. S. Spangler,—You and your friends have paid no attention to the notice you received a few days ago, instructing you to leave this place. We have visited your house, and found you had moved to another and also quit coming to the round-house after night, which is very well for you; but we have selected a man out of our gang for the purpose of lynching you all, and he will get you sooner or later, if you don't leave. He is a man that has stained his hands several times, and will stain them again, if you men will not leave without. We have warned you our last time, so you can look out. We think our man will get the last one of you pretty soon.

Yours,

KNIGHTS OF LABOR COW-BOYS, MOB NO. 1.

anonymous, were sent to Mr. Hoxie and other Missouri Pacific officers. "Scabs" were beaten whenever there was a chance. Boarding-houses that entertained them were boycotted. The company had to establish houses of its own to shelter its workmen. Something like a reign of terror had set in. Law and order leagues were formed against the strikers, and in all the four States the military were called out. Near Sedalia, as early as the 23d of March, a train was wrecked, and two men were injured. Three weeks later, another wreck was caused at the same place by the removal of a rail. At Kansas City, two or three days after the first train was run, a wreck was caused by a switch turned under the train. At Fort Worth, Texas, and at Parsons, Kansas, the strikers were especially turbulent. At Parsons, they ruled the town; and not until a strong force of militia arrived there, on April 3, was order restored. At Fort Worth, on that day, a train was fired on by ambushed strikers; and three deputy-sheriffs were shot, one of them fatally. On April 26, when the failure of the strike had become palpable, a train was wrecked by a displaced rail at Wyandotte, opposite Kansas City, and two men were killed.

At East St. Louis, the course of events was similar. At first there was comparative quiet. But, when the attempt was made to resume traffic, the strikers became violent. Teamsters and freight handlers were driven from their work. Engines were killed. The civil authorities were powerless: deputy-sheriffs were laughed at by the mob. The sheriff sent word to Governor Oglesby that he could do nothing, but the governor was slow to act. He sent his adjutant-general to East St. Louis, and went there himself, and harangued the strikers, telling them he was a friend of the laboring man, but that they must not be disorderly. The roads tried to move trains, under heavy guards of deputy-sheriffs. Finally, on April 9, some of the undisciplined guards, frightened by the

threatening crowd, fired into it, and killed half a dozen people. Then, at last, the militia were sent to the town, and order was restored; but furtive acts of violence continued, in occasional shootings, incendiary fires, the beating of unprotected "scabs." For a month, traffic could be carried on only under the guard of the soldiers.

There is no doubt that the acts of violence are to be laid at the door of the Knights of Labor of Assemblies 101 and 93. Their leaders, it is true, constantly protested that violence and disorder were contrary to the principles of the Knights, and could be the work only of individual reckless spirits. But this was a mere pretence, and a shallow one.* They had a notion that they were carrying on a war; that they had the rights of belligerents; and that all hostile measures were justifiable.†

* At East St. Louis, the leaders of the Knights said to the adjutant-general that they were peaceable, and would not interfere with trains; but, when a train was started, it was boarded, the coupling-pins were drawn, and the brakes set, under his eyes,—the Knights' committee-men, meanwhile, running alongside, shouting in vain to their followers that the adjutant-general was looking on, and that the train should be let go. The same thing happened at Parsons, Kansas. *Globe-Democrat*, March 31, May 5, and the testimony before the Congressional Committee.

† The adjutant-general of Kansas testified before the Congressional Committee that at Parsons "Buchanan [the local leader of the Knights] took the position, and another gentleman, by the name of Hollis, who was present at that time, that they were entitled to the rights of belligerents; that it was justifiable revolution. . . . Mr. Buchanan went so far as to bring his dictionary to show me the distinction between revolution and rebellion, and argued it at some length." Irons was asked by a member of the committee, "Do you regard a strike as very much like an act of war?" *Answer*: "A strike, when right, is represented to be a struggle for right. Yes, sir." And again: "And it is an act of war, and is often followed by violence, is it not?" *Answer*: "Often followed by violence on the part of, perhaps, the property owners themselves; and, I think, in most cases so."

The following bit of testimony is only in part relevant at this point, but I quote it in full, by way of illustrating the temper and methods of the Knights. It comes from a merchant tailor, a witness before the Congressional Committee:

"*Q.*—Were you a Knight of Labor until the strike? *A.*—Yes, sir. I was in good standing up to that time. I was at but one meeting after the strike. I was requested to go there one night; and I was there awhile, until they commenced to detail pickets. I asked them what that was for, and they said, To go and guard the roads. I don't know whether I am allowed to use the language I use sometimes."

Irons harangued the East St. Louis strikers, and advised them to give "pills to scabs." * A Knight of Labor from De Soto told the Congressional Committee that the Master Workman of his Local Assembly had ordered him to aid in stopping trains; when he refused, he was expelled from the order. This same Master Workman told the locomotive engineers that the Knights must win, "by fair means or foul." † When the train at Fort Worth was fired on from the ambush, the Master Workman of the Local Assembly was recognized as the leader of the shooters. The men who wrecked the train at Wyandotte were

"Q.—Yes, sir. A.—'Well,' says I, 'I'll be damned if I go and be a picket. I have done my picketing.' And I got up and walked out, and I never went there since. Previous to that,—previous to the strike,—I received a note, a letter, from the office, which I would like to read. 'De Soto, Mo., March 4. Brother Becker,—It would be a good thing for the welfare of your son not to make himself so busy. R. R. D., it is signed. I went over immediately to the office. My son is a clerk in the office, under Mr. Kennan, the division superintendent; and I handed him that letter, and told him to read it. [It appeared that the son had helped in handling a boycotted freight car.] Says I, 'My son, do you understand that?' He says, 'I do.' I says, 'My son, I want you to attend to your legitimate business. Whatever the company requires of you to do, do it faithfully; and any man that interferes with you and your business, shoot him, and, by God, I will stand by you.' That is the way I talked to him. . . . That evening Mr. Mike Connell, I believe his name is, came into my shop; and he addressed me. Says he, 'Commander,' says he, 'I would like to talk with you.' Says I, 'All right, sir.' Says he, 'I don't want you to get excited.' Says I, 'I hope I won't.' This was before the strike, on the evening of the 5th. Says he, 'I come in to tell you,—to speak to you about your son Elmer. It seems he is busying himself around a good deal; and,' says he, 'it will be to your advantage, and also to his'n, if you would have him attend to his business.' Says I, 'I thank you for your kindness for coming in and telling me this; but,' says I, 'I received a letter purporting to be just what you said.' And then I used some language in regard to the man who wrote it not signing his name to it. 'Well,' says he, 'it will be to your advantage, your business advantage, and also to Elmer's, to make him just attend to his legitimate business; and, if he don't,' says he, 'after this thing is over,' says he, 'perhaps he can't stay there.' I says, 'Why?' He says, 'We will have him turned off.' Says I, 'Just as long as he attends to the business right for Mr. Kennan and the railroad company, he will stay there.' He says, 'Stop: Mr. Kennan won't stay there. Perhaps we will turn him off.' I says, 'Not by a damned sight.' That is the language I used. That is my way of expressing myself. . . .

"Q.—You say you had finished your time of picketing. Where did you picket? A.—In the army,—in the Union Army, sir.

"Q.—Did you? A.—I did, sir; and I am proud of it."

* See the testimony of A. F. Walsh before the Congressional Committee.

† *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 12. In this issue of the *Globe-Democrat*, Governor Curtin, of the Congressional Committee, is reported as saying: "It is obvious that their [the Knights'] officers at De Soto and elsewhere sanctioned and organized this sort of thing. It is a waste of time to keep asking if the Knights of Labor knew anything about stopping and derailing trains."

ferreted out by detectives in the course of the summer. Their confessions showed that the deed had been planned in the Knights of Labor meeting-room in Kansas City, and that the wrecking party had been led by the head of the Local Assembly.*

We turn now to another phase in the strike,—the action of the General Executive Board of the Knights of Labor.† The constitution of the order gave this Board no authority in the matter of strikes. Strictly, the District Assemblies were subject to no control. Yet the Board had often exercised an influence or authority over District and Local Assemblies; and during the Wabash strike of August, 1885, it had negotiated on behalf of the Knights of Assembly 101, and had made pledges that purported to bind them,—among others, that no strike should take place without notice to the officers of the Missouri Pacific.‡ When the strike of 1886 broke out, the vice-president of the Missouri Pacific telegraphed to Mr. Powderly, the head of the order, asking what it meant. The strike, however, was a surprise to that gentleman. He had little

* *Globe-Democrat*, July 19. [The trial for murder of this person, the chairman of the executive board of the Local Assembly at Kansas City, was going on when this article went to press.]

† The letters that passed between the Board and the Missouri Pacific officers, and the appeals of the Board to the public, are collected in the pamphlet entitled *Official Correspondence*.

‡ As to the powers of the General Board, the reader should consult Commissioner Wright's account of the Knights of Labor, in this volume. During the Wabash strike, the following order, dated St. Louis, Aug. 18, 1885, was issued by the General Board: "To all Assemblies: All Knights of Labor in the employ of the Union Pacific, or of any of its branches, Gould's South-western system, or any other railroad, must refuse to repair or handle in any manner Wabash rolling-stock until further orders from the General Executive Board; and, if this order is antagonized by the companies, your executive committee is hereby ordered to call out all Knights of Labor on the above systems, without any further action. By order of the General Executive Board. Frederick Turner, S. G. T." This boycotting order is printed in the *Globe-Democrat* of April 26, 1886. It is authentic. The railroad companies knew of it at the time; and on the Union Pacific, where there was then much friction with the Knights, the officers had determined to fight on that issue. The settlement of the Wabash strike prevented the matter from coming to a head.

idea of what it meant, and he made no answer. But he went to the West about the middle of March, and looked over the field; and there is no doubt that what he saw did not please him, and that he tried to check the strike.* An attempt was being made by the striking Knights to extend the strike to other roads; from the first, they had been threatening to bring on a general railroad strike. The only serious danger of a spread of the strike seems to have existed on the 18th and 19th of March. At that time, delegates of the Knights on the Union Pacific road (on which the Knights were numerous and firmly organized) went to Kansas City to see whether they should aid their brethren of the Missouri Pacific.† The result of the conference, at which Mr. Powderly was present, was not favorable for the strikers. The Knights of the Union Pacific refused to join them. The secrecy which is usual with the Knights was observed in regard to the meeting, but there is little doubt that the influence of Mr. Powderly was exercised in favor of peace. District Assembly 101 was left to fight its own battle, with such aid only as it could get from the General Board.

At the time of the Kansas City conference, Mr. Powderly wrote to Mr. Hoxie, asking an interview. Mr.

* Mr. Powderly at various times expressed condemnation of the strike. According to Kochitsky, Commissioner of Labor Statistics of Missouri, Mr. Powderly said to Governor Martin of Kansas that the strike was without need or cause. See Kochitsky's testimony before the Congressional Committee, *Globe-Democrat*, May 9. To Mr. Gould he said that the strikers had disobeyed the laws of the Knights, and that he had it in mind to revoke their charter. See the stenographic report of the conference of March 30 between the General Board and the Missouri Pacific officers, *Official Correspondence*, p. 23. The strike seems to have been the occasion of Mr. Powderly's "secret circular" to the Knights (dated March 13, and printed in all the newspapers within a fortnight), in which strikes in general are reprehended.

† In the stenographic report of the interview of March 30 between the Knights' Board and the Missouri Pacific officers, the following passage occurs, *Official Correspondence*, pp. 24, 25:—

"*Mr. Hopkins.* This is a letter from Omaha, speaking of the state of things on the Union Pacific: 'The executive committee of the Knights of Labor on the Union Pacific — their head-quarters being at Denver — went to

Hoxie sent a pungent though courteous answer, the gist of which was that he had been taught by his experience not to deal with the Knights ; and he refused to meet any one as representative of the order. The negotiations then shifted to New York. On the 27th of March, the General Board of the Knights sent a formal letter to Mr. Gould as president of the Missouri Pacific Road. They proposed arbitration. Then ensued that curious correspondence which for several days kept the country in a state of wonder, and in which the leaders of the Knights showed but little diplomatic skill. Mr. Gould consented to meet them as "private individuals." The result of a long interview was that Mr. Gould sent a telegram to Mr. Hoxie, saying that "we see no objections to arbitrating any differences between the employees and the company, past or future." It is not easy to see that Mr. Gould here committed himself to anything ; and, obviously, it is uncertain whether "past or future" refers to the employees or to the difficulties. But the Board pronounced this satisfactory,— nay, proclaimed in the newspapers and telegraphed to Irons that "Gould has consented to our proposition for arbitration" ; and Mr. Powderly ordered the South-western Knights to resume work. But Mr. Gould pointed out the next day that he had by no means consented to arbitrate in the sense in which Mr. Powderly had given the public to understand that he would. He

Kansas City the other day on the war-path. They were preparing for a strike everywhere. They got back to Denver on the 20th. My informant writes me that their whole temper had changed. In conversation among themselves, they bitterly denounced the Knights of Labor of Missouri and Kansas. . . . Powderly, they say, was right in going home ; that he could not defend the action of the men ; that their demands were outrageously unjust ; that they were tyrannical and aggressive.'

"*Mr. Powderly.* There is not a word of truth in that thing from beginning to end. . . . They did not go on the war-path. . . . They were of the idea that they were not to make further trouble. They went back with the same mind."

The letter from which Mr. Hopkins quoted came from a thoroughly credible source, known to the present writer, who is constrained to believe, notwithstanding Mr. Powderly's denial, that the Union Pacific Knights went to Omaha with a mind to aid the South-western strikers, but, after looking over the field, concluded, for whatever reasons, not to take any action.

had merely given Mr. Hoxie authority to do so, and had left the whole matter in that gentleman's hands. Thereupon, after another long interview (March 30), Mr. Hoxie was asked, on behalf of Mr. Powderly, whether he would meet the General Board of the Knights or a committee of employees from the Knights. He answered guardedly that he was willing to meet a committee of employees who were actually at work; and the General Board, apparently thinking this satisfactory, once more ordered the Knights to return to work.

But the Board had little control over the members of Assembly 101. Neither its first nor its second order to resume work was obeyed. The men waited for instructions from their local leader, Irons.* The only offers to return to work came from committees of the striking Knights, who stipulated that all strikers should be taken back, except such as might be proved guilty of violence. They ignored the men whom the company had in the meanwhile engaged. They considered themselves as still in its employ, or at least as having a right to employment; and, notwithstanding the explicit terms of Mr. Hoxie's promise, they complained that he had violated it, because he refused to consider them as "actually at work."

Between the firmness of the company and the unrelenting temper of the strikers, the General Board was at a loss. Its members would probably have been willing to accept almost any terms that involved a recognition of their order. But a recognition Mr. Hoxie was determined not to yield, and the other officers of the company took their cue from him. Mr. Hoxie's firmness on this

* An engineer at De Soto testified before the Congressional Committee that, after Powderly's first order to resume work, he began to repair a disabled engine. He was told to desist. He answered that Powderly had called the strike off. The men replied, "Never mind Powderly: Martin Irons hasn't called it off." *Globe-Democrat*, May 12. There was a Powderly faction and an Irons faction in District Assembly 101: the former was strong, but the latter had control of the machinery and the offices.

point was not due to an unwillingness to deal with labor organizations in general. Indeed, in the course of this very strike, he negotiated with several of them;* but he would have nothing more to do with the Knights. The General Board, finding it impossible to extract a recognition, in the end fell in with the attitude of District Assembly 101, and tried to force a victory. Perhaps the more reckless spirits got the upper hand. Perhaps the Board soberly concluded that the best policy was to fight for the principle that their order must be dealt with, right or wrong. At all events, their action became feverishly aggressive after the close of the unsuccessful negotiations. They issued a manifesto alleging that Mr. Hoxie had broken his agreement "for the purpose of stock-jobbing speculation." A letter signed by Mr. Powderly and addressed to Mr. Gould was published, vaguely threatening that gentleman with ruin, if he did not put an end to the strike. The letter was in marked contrast to the rather moderate utterances which had hitherto come from Mr. Powderly. The Knights all over the country were called on for contributions to aid the strikers; and considerable sums seem to have been raised, and distributed in rather loose fashion.

But the battle was hopelessly lost. By the middle of April, traffic had been completely resumed on all lines of the Missouri Pacific. The active strikers of Assembly 101 were no more than a band of hunted outlaws, able to make themselves felt only because of the defenceless condition of a long line of railroad. The General Board was glad when a pretext was given for retiring from the field. The House of Representatives at Washington had appointed a committee to investigate the strike. The com-

* For example, with the Firemen's Brotherhood. The Missouri Pacific discharged in the course of the strike twenty-three firemen for abetting the strikers. The chief of the Brotherhood conferred with Mr. Hoxie, and a committee was appointed to investigate the action of the discharged men. Most of them were taken back.

mittee, soon after arriving in St. Louis, addressed to the General Board a request to put an end to the strike. Accordingly, they issued an order declaring it at an end. Thereby was brought to a formal close the most remarkable strike the country has seen. Not a concession had been made by the road. The Knights had suffered an overwhelming defeat.

Few of the strikers — not more than one-fifth — were taken back on the Missouri Pacific. The road refused to have any Knights of Labor in its service, and all who came back had to leave the order. No man known to have committed acts of violence was re-employed. The result caused no great hardship for the unmarried, roving men: they scattered, and found work elsewhere. But many had homes and families, and went through great distress. At the instance of the road, criminal proceedings were instituted against those who had been guilty of unlawful acts. Few convictions, however, were secured. Nor, indeed, were they needed to bring home to the rank and file of the strikers the completeness of their failure. The collapse of the strike and the distress that followed it were a sufficient retribution.

As the preceding narrative will have shown, the strike was not undertaken for the redress of grievances. I am not prepared to say that the strikers had, in fact, no good grounds for complaint. But many of their alleged grievances undoubtedly rested on unreasonable demands. Again, their leaders stated that the acts of abuse or injustice of which they complained were committed by subordinate officers. Yet they admitted that they had failed to present grievances to the higher officers for some time before the strike, and that these officers had given fair attention to their earlier demands.* For the gen-

*It is fit to say that my brief intercourse with Mr. Hoxie, whom the Knights held in particular aversion, left the impression that he was not only

eral lesson of the strike, however, it is not material whether or not the railroad company had done well or ill by its employees. The strike was a struggle for power. The Knights of Labor who were concerned in the strike thought that they were irresistible. They had "downed Jay Gould" once, and they were going to do it again.* In order to win their victory, they were determined to choke the railroad company, and, if need were, the community also. Traffic was to be suspended until their demands should be granted; and, to prevent traffic, law and order were systematically defied. No community can endure such tyranny. In this case, the unpopularity that attaches to the name of Gould served at first to bring to the strikers a support in public opinion; but their mismanagement soon turned the public against them. Indeed, their leadership was bad. They chose a poor point of attack in the discharge of Hall on the Texas and Pacific. They were extraordinarily reckless in their defiance of law. Their General Board neither supported them effectively nor saved the credit of the order by entirely repudiating them.† But, while with shrewder

an able man, but a straightforward and humane one, imbued with a strict sense of duty and discipline, but disposed to just treatment of his subordinates.

Irons testified that the superintendent of the Missouri Pacific proper was "always a gentleman," and "did everything in his power to rectify wrongs done to the men." To the general superintendent he had presented a grievance but once, and had then got what he wanted. He thought this officer also "would go as far as he could and be as fair as he could with his employees." Mr. Litchman, in his report on the strike, says that the testimony before the Congressional Committee "showed conclusively the existence of valid reasons for complaint, and a system of petty tyranny on the part of railroad under-bosses, which was beyond the power of human forbearance patiently to endure." So much of the testimony as I have seen, while it indicated some valid grounds for complaint, developed no "system" of petty tyranny.

* One of the Knights, named Cooper, a member of a local grievance committee, testified before the Congressional Committee that, after an interview with one of the railroad officers about a grievance, he was asked by the latter what report he should make. "Well," said he, "I am going to report that on general principles we can down you; but, on figures, you have got the advantage of us."

† It must not be supposed, however, that the strike was the work merely of the leaders. Mr. Litchman, in his report, says: "It is easy enough now

management they might have made a better fight, the attempt to dictate whether or not so vital an industrial function as the railway traffic of modern times should be carried on at all, must eventually have been defeated.

The South-western strike was not an isolated event. The same conditions prevailed on many other railroads. If the men had won a victory on the Missouri Pacific, a similar effort would soon have been made elsewhere; and, perhaps after a severer struggle, would doubtless have met with defeat. On the Denver and Rio Grande road there was in 1885 a strike similar in many ways to that in the South-west. The Missouri Pacific strike in the spring of 1885 was accompanied by a strike on the Wabash, and followed by another on that road in midsummer. The officers of the Union Pacific have been beset for several years with demands, complaints, grievances, threats of strikes, from Knights of Labor among their workmen. The strikes of the coal-miners of the Union Pacific, which led eventually to the massacre of Chinese miners at Rock Springs, were part of the struggle of the Knights against the Union Pacific. A determined trial of strength on that road came in May, 1886, when the brakemen struck, and tried to stop all freight traffic. But the road concentrated a large force of armed guards at Cheyenne, the head-quarters of the outbreak; and its vig-

to say that the strike was ill-timed, ill-advised, and badly managed. It is easy enough *now* to make Martin Irons a scape-goat, and say he ordered the strike without authority. But the truth is that every Local in the Assembly voted to give the District Board power to demand the adjustment of grievances complained of and the reinstatement of Brother Hall." On the other hand, the Missouri Labor Commissioner testified to the Congressional Committee that "the more conservative element in the order was not in sympathy with the strike," and thought it "causeless and mistaken"; and that, when Powderly issued his first order to return to work, "a great many men went back, but in many instances were prevented, threatened with violence, and quit again."

The surly and exasperating testimony given by Martin Irons before the Congressional Committee gives ample proof of his incapacity as a leader. In *Lippincott's Magazine* for June, 1886, is a braggart autobiographic sketch signed by him.

orous measures, enforced by the recent lessons of the South-west, led to a speedy rout of the strikers.* At the very time of the South-western struggle there were strikes of switchmen at Chicago and at various points in Missouri. In Missouri, the object was to get an advance of wages; and, after traffic had been stopped for a few days, the advance was secured. In Chicago, the switchmen's strike took place on the Lake Shore road, and was directed against the employ of non-union switchmen. It led to a long and bitter struggle, in which the beating of "scabs," derailing of trains, and defiance of law took place in much the same way, though not on so large a scale, as in the great trial of strength on the Missouri Pacific.

In all these cases, the essential cause of trouble was the same,—the instinct for power. There may have been grievances. Sometimes, the demands made were in themselves unreasonable, such as those for the discharge of competent men or the appointment of incompetent favorites. Sometimes, they were reasonable enough. But the true point at issue in almost all these struggles was the control which workmen should have in the management of the roads, and the threatened or actual means of enforcing that control was by annihilation of traffic. The men were endeavoring to secure a share in management beyond that for which they were qualified. The slow and steady movement of society has evolved something like a military organization. The rank and file are assigned their duties and their places by the captains of industry; and a considerable change from this state of things is not to be looked for in the immediate future. The struggle in the South-west was the result of an attempt to shift the centre of power and responsibility. It was watched keenly by the railroad workmen,—in-

* It should be said that the Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen promptly repudiated the action of the brakemen who struck on the Union Pacific, and expelled from its ranks twenty-six members and suspended thirty others for their action in this strike.

deed, by all classes of workmen, throughout the country ; and its signal defeat has sobered the ambitious spirits among them. We have hardly seen the last of these disturbances, but another such upheaval is not likely to come soon.

The history of labor organizations in the present century indicates that they will probably continue to grow in numbers and strength, and to secure a larger and larger share of attention in the management of industrial operations. It is not impossible, for instance, that some such right to employment as the Knights of Labor demanded in the South-western strike may obtain recognition ; that arbitrary discharges may be prevented by some method of check and investigation on the part of the workmen's organizations. But their attainment of such a jurisdiction and their general advance depend on the care, the intelligence, the reasonableness with which they are managed ; above all, on their capacity to select fit and capable leaders. In the South-western strike, they were led by ignorant and incapable men, not disposed to apply with fairness that control over the employment of workmen which they demanded, not fit to hold such a power over the roads and over the community as they were trying to exercise. Their failure was inevitable. Perhaps such an experience is a necessary phase. The trade-unions of England reached their present condition of comparative firmness and consolidation only after years of hard experience. The locomotive engineers in this country, in the early stages of their organization, showed the disposition to enforce their demands at whatever cost to the community. They were then defeated * ; and they have gradually sobered down to an attitude of moderation, and at the same time have attained a settled place and power.

*See the report of the Massachusetts Railroad Commissioners on the engineers' strike on the Boston and Maine road in 1877, *Massachusetts Legislative Documents*, 1877, *House No. 102*. See also the Report of the Massachusetts Commissioners for 1877, on the railroad strikes of that time, pp. 40-65.

Something must be said, in conclusion, on the lessons of the strike for the railroads. Of the policy of the Missouri Pacific and of other roads toward their workmen, it can at the least be said that it has not prevented hatred and hostility, nor interposed any check to an uprising against the employers. On most of the roads of the country, the switchmen, yardmen, and brakemen pick up a job here and there, rove from road to road, and rarely form part of the permanent force of any one. The men take their pay, give their services, and care no more for their employer than for the track on which they ride. Much the same is true of shop-mechanics and other workmen. All are held to a rigid discipline. The nature of the service demands that they should be more or less like machines, and little is done to show that they are considered anything more than machines. No attempt is made to bind the rank and file to the roads by ties of sympathy or advantage. Whatever may have been the objects of the leaders of the Knights in demanding a recognition of their order, the mass of the strikers sympathized with that demand as for a recognition of their manhood.

No doubt, in a half-settled country like that traversed by the Missouri Pacific, a hand-to-mouth policy is in large part inevitable. The industry of the region is growing and shifting, the population is more or less migratory, the roads are fighting for business and territory. But the stage of settlement of living from day to day is approaching its close. The time certainly has come in the older parts of the country,—it is rapidly coming everywhere,—when a systematic and stable organization of industry is possible. The events of the last few years have drawn the attention of railroad managers, as well as that of other large employers, to the need of a more stable, sound, and humane policy towards their workmen. Schemes for bettering the lot of railroad employees and for binding it more closely to the welfare of the roads are cropping out.

The Baltimore and Ohio road set in operation as early as 1882 an elaborate plan for pensioning its employees, insuring their lives, relieving them when sick, and helping their education.* The Pennsylvania road established in 1885 a tentative scheme of the same kind. Other roads have it in mind to try similar experiments. The employees, in their present temper, regard such plans with suspicion; and their success will depend largely on the temper in which they are carried out, and time must test whether they will bring more friendly relations. A disastrous experience like that in the South-west may pave the way both to better reason and sounder progress in the labor organizations, and to a more liberal and far-sighted policy on the part of great employers.

F. W. TAUSSIG.

* See the pamphlet by W. T. Barnard, *The Relation of Railway Managers and Employees*. Baltimore, 1886.